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ABSTRACT

This report presents findings of a study of effective placement programs, both secondary and postsecondary, which identified elements that contribute to program success. The analysis begins with a look at who operates the placement services, what their backgrounds are, and their similarities and differences in terms of philosophies, opinions, and practices. Discussion includes the role of teachers and other members of the placement team, not including placement personnel, and a comparison of the priority that different schools give to placement. Various strategies are described for accomplishing the basic components of placement: assessing the local employment market and students' job aptitudes, preemployment learning activities, job placement, follow up, and job development. Special efforts for groups such as dropouts, adults, and handicapped students are reviewed. Subsequent sections of the study focus on impediments to effective placement and some rewards of the placement job as seen through the eyes of those who accomplish it. Findings are summarized in a set of conclusions. The report concludes with recommendations for future directions and practices in the field of vocational-technical placement. (YLB)

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EFFECTIVE PLACEMENT PROGRAMS

FOR VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL STUDENTS

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FOREWORD

Placement. The word itself raises controversy among vocational educators. Having evolved out of the guidance function, placement is now assuming a status that is separate from, but equal to, its parent. Some practitioners even see it as the dominant of the two.

Opinion is divided, too, over how much should be done for (as opposed to by) the student, where the teacher fits into the placement function, and how important placement is in the total educational enterprise.

It would be hard to conceive of a more useful service to students — at the adult as well as the secondary and postsecondary levels — than job placement. Stripped of all nuances, it involves bringing the student and employer together, potentially to the benefit of both.

Complexity rules the placement province. The student enters this province with knowledge that is hard to gauge at times, skills that are in various states of refinement, and attitudes that often escape the most discerning eye. Buffeted by the winds of change, the employer appears on the scene with a need for someone to play a role in producing goods or providing services in a profitable manner.

Anyone who would presume to play match-maker between a student needing a job and an employer needing the most capable applicant he or she can find has chosen a professional existence that fairly crackles with significance.

So it is with the men and women who staff the placement offices of Ohio's high schools, joint vocational schools, and two-year postsecondary institutions.

You'll meet them in the pages of this report, which was authored by Ms. Frieda Douthitt. You'll become acquainted with the tradition they've inherited, and you'll sense the mixture of frustration and exhilaration they encounter in trying to serve individual human beings, business and industry, and the American economic system.

Joseph L. Davis

Dr. Joseph L. Davis, Executive Director

Glenn E. Selby

Glenn E. Selby, Chairperson

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INTRODUCTION

A growing number of educators believe that placement must have an expanded role in vocational education to help workers — adults as well as young people — adjust to a workplace in which change has become a constant.

Technology is radically altering America's industries and economy. Various societal forces propel women into the work force in unprecedented numbers. Both men and women now enter careers formerly closed to their gender. The times dictate a changing role for placement — and an increasingly important one.

"Placement is important now. The 'you're on your own' attitude is part of the past," Dr. Darrell L. Parks, Director of the Ohio Division of Vocational and Career Education, has said.[1]

Placement has not always enjoyed such advocacy. Its origins can be traced to the Middle Ages, when guilds helped journeymen in their job searches by posting notices in inns. Its background in this country begins late in the last century, when the City of New York began to provide public employment assistance by designating an area in each market for people who needed workers to meet those who needed work.

Ohio was the first state to establish an employment agency, in 1890. By 1907, the federal government had become involved in placement, eventually establishing a national job placement service through a combined federal-state agency.[2]

Job placement in schools began in several large cities in the early 20th Century. At that time, "guidance and placement were thought of as synonymous . . . . Although most of the early guidance proponents held that placement was a legitimate counseling function, counselors paid more attention to guidance than placement."[3]

The Sputnik challenge of the late 1950's led to the passage of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 to identify talented students for placement in advanced technical programs. This resulted in a growing concentration of effort on college-bound students in placement programs.

The Vocational Education Act of 1963 increased the significance of placement. Placement data could be used to show a return on the national investment in vocational education (a far more tangible measurement than was available for the other social programs of the 60's).

In the 70's, compensating the disadvantaged and handicapped became a national educational priority, and placement became more visible as challenges became more difficult with these groups. Affirmative action; equal employment opportunity; more stringent laws on hiring women, children, minorities, and the handicapped; and more attention to safety in the workplace all helped to elevate placement from a sideline of guidance to a legitimate educational function in its own right.

Today's rapid social, demographic, and economic changes are further altering perceptions of vocational placement. The transition from heavy manufacturing to a service-based economy, technology's impact on unskilled jobs, the decline of school enrollments, the large number of unemployed and underemployed adults — all these phenomena are profoundly felt in Ohio and are dictating a changed role for vocational placement.

For a young person, the first job placement is a turning point — from years of preparation to a lifetime of work. Similarly, job placement as a field of endeavor is now at a turning point in Ohio — from a somewhat controversial "step-child" of counseling to an accepted and important educational function.

Ohio: From Pioneer to Catch-Up

Ohio was a national leader in the development of vocational job placement, due largely to pioneering work of Dr. Raymond A. Wasil in the early 1970's in the Akron Public Schools. Other states then usurped the lead, mandating placement services for all vocational students: Florida in 1973, Virginia in 1975, and Michigan in 1976. "If we'd kept on with [the Akron initiative], we'd be way ahead by now," says one Ohio vocational educator. "Instead, we're playing catch-up."

Responding to today's imperatives, the Ohio Department of Education has increased its emphasis on vocational placement. In 1984, vocational placement became a responsibility of the Career Development Service of the Division of Vocational and Career Education, which has heightened the priority and the effectiveness of vocational placement in Ohio by:

- Creating three regional placement councils and a statewide task force to focus on Ohio's vocational placement services.

- Holding a series of regional planning meetings that offered a forum for individuals involved in placement to discuss issues relating to statistical reporting and evaluation, programming, and the duties and responsibilities of the position.

- Planning the first placement director's handbook and outline of placement officers' duties organized around components of placement first set forth by Wasil: pre-employment training, community and staff coordination, job development, and evaluation and follow-up.

- Putting the computer at the service of job placement, through the Ohio Career Information System (OCIS) and "crosswalking" civilian and military occupations so that military jobs can count as school-based job placements.

- Sponsoring a reception in late 1985 to establish a closer understanding between placement directors and Army and Navy education specialists — another example of the way the state has begun to encourage placement specialists to broaden their working relationships beyond the confines of school and community.

Ohio funds local districts for full-time vocational placement coordinators who help teachers link employer needs with student availability. The salary for a full-time placement director may be reimbursed up to $9,000, as long as there is no decrease in guidance counselor staff.

The department's policy has always been that placement is the responsibility of vocational teachers. Decisions on placement programs are not mandated by the state, but rather left to the local districts. The state does require a follow-up report including placement rate for each program, each year, but no punitive nor incentive action follows as a result.

The state suggests a minimum placement rate of 60 percent within the areas in which students were trained. If a program shows a rate lower than that, the district must justify it in light of local conditions or re-evaluate whether the program should continue.

Synopsis of Placement Literature

Much of the literature on vocational placement in Ohio and the rest of the nation describes and critiques specific placement programs. Not surprisingly, those with the most organized systems and careful attention to the components of placement enjoy the greatest success.

Missouri's Statewide Job Placement Service is probably today's pre-eminent model. Described in a 1983 study, it includes school-based placement, workshops, seminars, collection of follow-up information on students, job development and employer public relations activities, and placement coordinators' meetings.[4]

The Kentucky Placement and Follow-up System was assessed in a 1980 University of Kentucky study. The study concludes that, for the system to be fully effective, placement and follow-up must be equal partners.[5]

A school-based job placement model in Pennsylvania was found to be effective in a 1975 survey that showed 86.5% of students used the service and 75% found the information provided by the service to be excellent. Among employers, 84.5% used the service, and 95.6% of those who used it were satisfied with the results.[6]

In Ohio, a 1978 report by the Ohio Legislative Service Commission contains findings on vocational job placement results and makes these recommendations:

- The Division of Vocational and Career Education should upgrade placement as an aspect of program accountability in the PRIDE evaluation process.
- The Division should integrate placement results into both its labor needs forecasts and its program approval process.
- The Division and the Board of Regents should cooperate either to eliminate programs in which secondary vocational training is inadequate or to arrange technical college advance placement for vocational graduates in such programs.
- The Division should provide school guidance counselors with information about below-average placement results in certain programs . . . and encourage them to make the information available to students.
- The General Assembly should authorize the Division to advertise statewide to inform employers about vocational graduates' availability and skills.
- The Division . . . should encourage each school or district to designate an individual as the central contact for employers and clearinghouse for employment information.[7]

These observations were made relatively early in Ohio's movement to improve vocational job placement. It is interesting to note how many of the recommendations have been or are being implemented, and how many others still concern the people who work in vocational placement throughout Ohio.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Purpose

This report is a study of effective placement programs, both secondary and postsecondary, in existence in Ohio today. It is intended to identify the elements in these programs that contribute to their success.

Procedure

The research procedure was as follows:

- The researcher held discussions with vocational and technical education authorities in the state in order to: a) gain a broad, introductory insight into the field, b) learn state policies and administrative approaches to the subject, and c) discover which local placement programs state authorities felt were exemplary and should be made a part of this investigation.
- Selected literature on vocational placement was reviewed to learn the state-of-the-art nationally and to get an understanding of Ohio's position vis-a-vis other states.
- Selection criteria were prioritized for a series of interviews with authorities in Ohio vocational school districts and technical, community, and proprietary colleges. Since the study was to examine successes in placement programs, it was not considered important for the sample to be representative of all schools. However, selection criteria did include geographic dispersion throughout the state and diversity in types of programs. It was felt important to include placement programs that deal with unique situations or populations.
- A written list of interview questions was developed from information gleaned from the selected literature and initial interviews.
- Interviews were conducted at the schools, primarily with placement people, but to a lesser extent also with administrators and teachers.
- The researcher gained additional first-hand information on vocational placement in Ohio by attending a meeting of the statewide placement task force and a state-sponsored conference on legal aspects of placement.
- The results of the interviews were analyzed and organized for writing.

Profile of Selected Schools

The list of interviewees included representatives of 11 secondary schools and five postsecondary schools. Since one purpose of the study was to report on the breadth and diversity of placement services, some programs that concentrate on particular problems or populations were chosen: a joint vocational school in a high unemployment area with many adult workers displaced by closing industries; and a school that has in-depth services for students with various types and degrees of handicaps.

Ten of the secondary placement programs examined are in joint vocational school districts. Of these, three are rural, and seven serve rural and suburban populations near large cities. One comprehensive, large-city school system with its own vocational program was included.

The remainder of the sample consists of three technical colleges — one rural, one in a large city, and one on the periphery of a medium-sized city; one city-based community college; and one proprietary college in a large city.

The sample includes every geographic section of Ohio. Two of the schools are in north central Ohio, three in the northeast sector, three in central Ohio, two in southeastern Ohio, four in the southwestern area, one in the west central portion, and one in the northwest region.

Five of the schools are in economically depressed areas; seven are in or near urban centers where economic rebound is evident; and four are in locations that might be characterized as economically neutral.

Organization of the Report

From the outset, the importance of the people involved in placement was apparent. The quality of the professionals was seen as greatly influencing placement success. In light of this, the analysis begins with a look at who operates the placement services, what their backgrounds are, and their similarities and differences in terms of philosophies, opinions, and practices.

Discussion includes the role of teachers and others beside placement personnel and a comparison of the priority that different schools give to placement.

Various strategies are described for accomplishing the basic components of placement: assessing the local employment market and students' job aptitudes, pre-employment learning activities, job placement, follow-up, and job development.

Special efforts for groups such as drop-outs, adults, and handicapped students are reviewed.

Subsequent sections of the study focus on impediments to effective placement and some of the rewards of the placement job as seen through the eyes of those who accomplish it.

The findings are summarized in a set of conclusions, and the report concludes with recommendations for future directions and practices in the field of vocational-technical placement.

FINDINGS

Placement People: Who Are They?

Ohio has 79 people in its vocational schools whose assignment is job placement, exclusively or in combination with other duties.[8] The number is almost equally divided among full-time placement directors, personnel combining other administrative functions with placement, and guidance counselors with placement responsibilities.

Placement people at the secondary and postsecondary levels have many titles. "Placement coordinator" is the one more frequently encountered. However, "career counselor," "placement director," and "job referral manager" appear, too.

These people wear an array of "hats" even more varied than their titles. Sales, marketing, psychological counseling, public relations, community liaison, diplomacy, and trouble-shooting are all within their scope. Some refer to their role as "catalyst," "ice breaker," "clearinghouse," or "the place where the buck stops."

There is no training or certification specific to the placement role. Placement people bring to their jobs a range of talents and experience gained in other disciplines. An informal survey of members of the Ohio Placement Directors' Task Force revealed they come from careers as diverse, but appropriate, as personnel management, social work, retail sales, finance, economics, business management, military procurement, and stock brokerage, as well as the more usual teaching and administration backgrounds.

Not surprisingly, people of such diverse experience have varying philosophies about their work. Some even eschew the word placement.

One placement coordinator claims: "We basically don't do placement. We do referral, we do pre-employment preparation, assessment, job development, and follow-up. For lack of a better term we call it placement. But the person has to sell himself."

Another tries to get away from using the word on the grounds that it is paternalistic. He says, "It perpetuates dependence. If someone else has to find you a job, you're probably not worth hiring."

"I've never placed a kid," says another. "I'm just a facilitator. The kid has to sell himself. I like to open doors for them."

At the other end of the paternalism vs. independence spectrum are those who specialize in placing handicapped students, youth with special needs, and those whose continued livelihood depends directly on their placement record.

"If kids have the right to learn entry-level skills, they also have a right to help in getting their first job and, for many of them, their second job," says an administrator of a learning center, whose special needs graduates enjoy a placement rate as high as those in the adjoining regular vocational schools. Proprietary school graduates may use school placement services to get their second and third jobs, as well as their first.

What Attributes Do Placement People Share?

Not only are placement people practical in their desire to help, but they also attach high value to credibility, flexibility, versatility, innovation, commitment, and communication.

Honesty is the sine qua non. Scrupulous honesty is the reason trusting employers call and say, "Just send me someone. You know what I need," reports one administrator. Another placement coordinator says that when he sends an employer a marginal job candidate, he's careful to tell him about the student's limitations. "That way, I can protect the interests of both the student and employer," he says.

Flexibility, versatility, and the freedom to innovate are virtues. "The methods you use for one group won't work for another," observes a postsecondary placement officer. "We try anything we can think of. It is doesn't work, we drop it," claims another.

Flexibility ceases to be a virtue, however, when it jeopardizes instructional values. A technical school president refuses "to bastardize our curriculum to meet temporary, short-term needs of an employer." A secondary placement coordinator concurs: "The minute we empty these classrooms and become a cheap job market, we cease being an educational institution."

Placement people are the last to claim that they do their jobs alone. They credit teachers, administrators, students, the community, and parents for making placement happen. But it doesn't happen without commitment. Many placement people perceived their success as directly proportionate to the degree of commitment the board and administration give to placement.

If placement is built from the attitudes and efforts of many people, then communication is the glue that holds the structure together. All placement officers agree that keeping in touch with classroom teachers is essential, and that communication with students, the community, employers, and parents is only slightly less important.

Who Actually Performs Placement?

Historically, in Ohio, vocational placement has been the responsibility of vocational teachers. Without exception, the practitioners interviewed for this study — at both the secondary and postsecondary levels — acknowledged the pivotal role played by teachers in the placement effort. Their contribution ranges from the quality of instruction that makes graduates employable and easy to place, to the sharing of job leads, to actually "pounding the pavement" to do job development and placement.

There are almost as many different staff configurations for sharing the placement responsibility as there are vocational schools.

- At a large southwestern jointure serving parts of 12 counties, the central placement office is augmented by a guidance counselor in each of four satellite schools who combines placement and recruiting. A great deal of placement takes place at the local level; the central placement officer acknowledges there are many placements he never hears about.
- Another joint vocational district that serves 14 "home" school districts tried to get along without a placement director, and found that it didn't work. "It was like going into a discount store and waiting for a salesperson who never shows up," says the present full-time placement director.
- Another full-time placement coordinator gets many of his job leads through teachers and wishes they had more time to devote to placement, because then he could spend more time on hard-to-place students.

- A five-county vocational school follows the opposite pattern. There, no one person has undivided responsibility for placement, though administrators feel that fewer job leads might slip through the cracks if there were one central referral point. Senior teachers operating cooperative placement programs are assigned half days to that responsibility.

- In still another configuration, placement is shared among senior instructors, a supervisor of guidance and placement, and an in-house office of the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services (OBES). The teacher takes the major responsibility for student assessment, the OBES officer for job procurement, and the placement supervisor for overall coordination.

Three joint vocational schools in the study are using federal funds to put additional resources and personnel into their placement efforts for disadvantaged populations. Two of these programs are funded by Transitions, which is administered through the state Vocational Home Economics office, and targeted to displaced homemakers, though other populations and regular secondary students are served as well. The source of funding for the third program is a federal program called Special Needs for Disadvantaged Youth and Adults, also administered through the state Division of Vocational and Career Education. These three districts are located in some of the highest-unemployment areas of the state.

- In one, Transitions pays for a full-time job development coordinator and full-time job placement coordinator, whereas placement formerly was part of the program coordinator's job.

- In the other Transitions program, a full-time placement coordinator augments the efforts of a guidance supervisor whose role is 20 percent placement and 80 percent counseling. He is adamant that one cannot do effective placement part-time.

- The Special Needs funds pay for a special placement director who works both with youth and adults. In addition, a full-time job placement person takes the program on the road to the feeder schools. But classroom teachers do most of the student placement.

Still other patterns:

- In a rural county vocational school, the director of community and industrial relations does the lion's share of job development and serves as the receptor for most employment requests. His work is abetted by a full-time placement coordinator who spends part-time recruiting in the feeder schools.

- In a large city district, each comprehensive high school has one wing devoted to two or three vocational programs. No one does vocational placement full-time. Teachers take major responsibility for job development, placement, and follow-up, which some assign to students as a class project.

- A semi-rural multi-county vocational school is moving away from traditional placement activities and toward a full spectrum of career education services. The placement person's title, career coordinator, is indicative of the shift in emphasis here to teaching students to find their own jobs.

How Do Instructors View Their Placement Responsibilities?

Teachers react in various ways to their placement responsibility -- and to the presence of a placement officer. It depends, says one placement coordinator, on whether the teacher comes from distributive education or some other discipline. Distributive educators are familiar with the "Jacksonville Plan," named for Jacksonville, Florida, where distributive education had its beginnings in the 1930's and where instructors walked the streets with their students to get them jobs.

Placement officers describe the range of teacher involvement:

> From [the distributive education] background, teachers expect to do placement. But if they come from other backgrounds, they don't.
>
> We get every degree of response from 'That's not my job,' and 'The placement person is paid to do it,' to the teachers who won't rest until every one of their kids has a job.

A technical college administrator says that teachers do nine-tenths of the placement at his school and resent having to turn over their better prospects to the placement office.

At the secondary level, a more typical reaction is gratitude, as expressed by one welding teacher:

> [The placement officer] has been a tremendous help. With the two of us working together, I spend less time. If I find jobs, I work them though him, and vice versa. I always had high placement, but having him makes it so much easier.

Having both teachers and placement officers work on placement opens them to a risk that the early placement programs of the 1970's were designed to forestall: namely, overlapping and duplication of efforts. Placement people admit that these things happen, but don't look on them as major problems.

"Efforts to coordinate day school teachers, adult teachers and placement activities have not been very successful," says one guidance and placement supervisor. Another placement coordinator who is responsible for job-development over a multi-county rural area, says:

> The turn-off comes for me when the employer has seen two other job development people in the same day. It happens occasionally, but it hasn't been a big problem. It's not realistic to "mark out our territory" for fear of overlap.

Other Placement Partners: Cooperation, Not Competition

Though teachers and placement officers have the main responsibility for placement, they are the first to acknowledge that they are not the only members of the placement team. "Placement is the joint responsibility of the kids, school, parents, and the city," one placement coordinator says.

Many placement people report a high degree of cooperation with other agencies, notably OBES and the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR). Placement officers who work with adults cooperate closely with Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA, successor to CETA) personnel and Private Industry Councils (PIC's). Many of their referrals, and frequently their funding, come from those sources. Two placement officers report good success in working with temporary employment agencies. They say that many permanent jobs start out as temporary ones.

Interdistrict cooperation is an occasional, but not a major, avenue of placement. The state Division of Vocational and Career Education's efforts to contact and organize those with placement responsibilities in all the state's vocational schools has, in effect, created a statewide network of placement officers and furnished a directory that facilitates interdistrict cooperation.

In summary, cooperation, and not competition, is the dominant theme in placement.

Placement Patterns at the Postsecondary Level

If patterns of staffing are varied in vocational schools, they are even more so on the postsecondary level. Placement efforts in tax-supported community colleges and technical institutes seem to vary in intensity with the local economy, the type of clientele, and the perceived mission of the school. None dismiss it as unimportant; it's just more badly needed in some sectors than others. Postsecondary placement officers belong to the Ohio Two-Year College Placement Association.

Of the postsecondary schools included in this study, the most all-out placement effort was found at a metropolitan community college where a full-time staff of three serves 3,000 to 5,000 of the college's 16,000 students in an impressively equipped Career Planning and Placement Center. They field some 400 employer calls per month in their city's rebounding economy.

These emphatic placement efforts are in stark contrast with a big-city technical college where placement is at or near 100 percent year after year, despite the lack of any formal placement program, and a semi-urban technical college whose president finds it hard to justify a full-time placement person "to place 300 kids in fields where there's a scarcity."

Proprietary schools, on the other hand, almost without exception have a full-time employment counselor who sees every student before graduation. One Columbus proprietary school offers an exception; the owner conducts all placement activities himself.

"We take it much more seriously," acknowledges the executive director of the Ohio Council of Private Colleges and Schools. "The JVS is still going to be there. But if we don't place graduates, we won't have students."

Placement: How High a Priority?

The importance of placement in the school's total mission varies from "supremely important" in the case of proprietary schools, to "highly important" as the justification for continued existence, to ranking second or third behind instructional considerations. Placement people tend to look upon placement as the end that justifies the means:

> If you're not training kids to be placed, then you have no measure of your success.
>
> We're the end of the line. There are many taxpayer dollars flowing in here. This is how we account to the taxpayer.
>
> There's only one measure of vocational education or any other training program that tells the politician who must approve money for your job how well you're doing it, and that's how well your students can go out and get jobs and keep them.

In adult vocational education and some of the other special needs programs, placement is "the bottom line," says one state vocational education administrator. Whether the adult student or a government agency is paying for the training, placement is all that counts.

Placement Strategies: How Placement People Do Their Work

The placement process can be viewed as having several distinct parts: assessment (of the job market as well as the student or prospective employee); pre-employment preparation; placement in part-time or co-op jobs while still in school; placement upon graduation; follow-up; and job development.

Assessment. For some clients, assessment is the most critical part of the process. Adult students do not have the leisure to train for a field in which their chances of landing a job are slim.

The placement officer in one adult program says the most critical part of the process is the intake interview in which she and the program instructor interview each prospective student before accepting the candidate into the program. "A skilled placement person can see things other than just the one defined skill," she says, and can help the candidate explore ancillary fields if his first choice proves unsuitable.

Assessment or "work evaluation" is critical in training and placing handicapped students. Prospective students come to one vocational Skill Center for 17 days of evaluation during the summer. They work in groups of 12, with one teacher assigned to four students. Parents are counseled about the findings. "If the initial evaluation is done well, everything else falls into place," says an administrator.

At the postsecondary level, assessment may be done in conjunction with local high schools or vocational schools. One technical college has a formal "articulation agreement" with the city schools in which seniors are competency-tested for credit toward an associate degree. A community college has a pilot program with a neighboring joint vocational school to test students in electronics and to offer college credit and after-school courses in college math and English for those who qualify.

For job-market assessment, most vocational schools rely heavily upon their employer advisory councils. Keeping abreast of the local job market is often named as one of the best reasons for involving teachers in job placement and development. Other placement officers look to OBES and Department of Labor sources for job market information.

Pre-Employment Preparation. A student who completed vocational school without some formal instruction in job-seeking techniques would be a rarity in Ohio. Just how basic the instruction is depends on the clientele. For adult and disadvantaged students, pre-employment preparation often must address attitudes and basic skills before the finer points of job-seeking can be taught.

Pre-employment preparation is "incredibly important" for disadvantaged job seekers, says one placement officer who works extensively with adults. "We literally tell them what to say and when to say it."

At a self-contained vocational Skills Center, job-seeking skills can be taught right along with job skills. Pre-employment preparation includes filling out applications and taping mock interviews with volunteers from the community. Much of the teaching is attitudinal.

Regular vocational students learn to write resumes, complete applications, and practice interview techniques either as part of English and social studies courses or in separate classes. Often, the placement person goes into the classroom to teach these units.

Placement officers shared a variety of helpful techniques:

- Teaching a course for teachers on pre-employment instruction.
- Advising job seekers to forego unconventional clothing and hair styles.
- Advising students to avoid marijuana or other drugs because many prospective employers require a urine test.
- Providing students with a data card to be carried in the wallet for ready access to the information needed in filling out applications.
- Inviting a panel of local employers to talk to seniors about what is expected of entry-level employees.
- Sponsoring a "Day on the Job" or "job shadowing" program in which each senior finds an employer who will allow him access to the work place for a day and who will be willing to review his resume and application and conduct a mock interview. About 15 percent of the students find jobs with these employers.
- Approaching an employer when there's no job available. "He has more time to talk and is more likely to remember you when he does have a job opening," the placement officer tells his clients.
- Enlisting the computer in pre-employment instruction. Software like "Career Scan" and "Resume Writer" allow a student to study career information or lead him step by step through composing a resume.

Postsecondary schools do not stress and mandate pre-employment training to the extent that vocational schools do, but it's there for those who want it, and it is a mandatory part of co-op programs.

Placement in Part-Time Jobs While Still in School. Most vocational students have a taste of employment before they complete their education and look for a full-time job. In most vocational and technical schools, placement personnel and faculty are involved in finding and monitoring these part-time jobs as a means of keeping students in school and giving them lab experience in their chosen occupations.

A large-city comprehensive school system runs extensive Occupational Work Experience (OWE) and Occupational Work Adjustment (OWA) programs to induce drop-out-prone youth to stay in school. Students identified as discipline and attendance problems, who are behind their age level in grade and reading ability, are eligible for OWE. Teachers find them entry-level jobs where they may work 15 to 20 hours per week as long as they attend school also.

OWA is for 14- and 15-year-old students; they work on personal and job-related attitudes plus one academic subject in school and at a job outside school for two or three hours per day. They are required to bank 20 percent of their earnings.

Part-time and even full-time employment is an essential part of schooling for handicapped students, since they learn much more readily through hands-on experience than through classroom, textbook, lecture, or other more traditional forms of instruction.

In many regular vocational programs, part-time jobs provide an additional learning station. Early placement of seniors is a major component of instruction at a southwestern Ohio jointure, where the guiding criterion is that the job offer a training environment superior to the school's. Teachers are required to visit the student on the job.

A large-city technical college operates an extensive co-op program which gives students experience in getting a job as well as the work of the job itself. The school sends several candidates for co-op openings. The employer is not obliged to hire or to keep any employee. For two-thirds of the students, co-op placement is permanent job placement; they wind up keeping their co-op jobs after graduation. But the school has dropped employers for talking students out of coming back to school.

One technical school does not have a placement office. Finding the jobs is the co-op coordinators' function. Sixty faculty members have that as part of their responsibility. For this, they received an additional $675 per year and a slightly lighter teaching load.

In other parts of the state, job opportunities are not numerous enough to operate such a program. Even so, a technical college in one of the state's high unemployment areas manages to hire 300 to 500 of its own students for campus jobs. The college has a formal monitoring and evaluation process for these students. Maintaining good grades is one of the conditions of their employment.

Placement upon Graduation. Successful placement really begins, one educator observes, with reading and math skills. The vocational teacher adds skills onto this foundation. For a well-prepared student, placement is not a hurdle.

Ohio's placement officers emphasize that they cannot really "place" students in jobs. They can develop leads, set up interviews, and provide students with job-seeking knowledge and skills; but ultimately the student must sell himself.

Many schools have students register with the placement service, which operates as a clearinghouse for referral and matching. The placement officer, in one multi-building district, sends job referrals to the building counselor and he gives them to teachers, who give them to students to take with them on interviews.

More and more placement offices are enlisting the computer in the job-matching process. Many are still in the "shakedown" stages, but one that has been on-line for some time maintains a computer list of all employers as well as whom they hired. Every two weeks, the computer prints out all job leads. This "on-line" operation is situated in a high employment area near a very large city. By December, 1985, there were no 1986 graduates left to place, and the placement office was turning down requests at the rate of 10 per day. All but five 1985 graduates had jobs, and of the five still looking, two had been absent 20 percent or more of the time and four had grade averages lower than C.

The northwestern five-county jointure placed 80 to 90 percent of its Skill Center completers, a figure similar to that for regular vocational program completers and much higher than that for the population as a whole.

Technical colleges report placement figures consistently at or near 100 percent. The Ohio Council of Private Schools and Colleges reports that 90 percent of proprietary school completers find jobs.

At the other end of the placement spectrum, some placement officers report placement rates of 50, 60, and 70 percent. All schools reporting low placement figures are in locales where unemployment is in the mid-teens.

Placement people are under no illusions that they are the sole or even chief source of job referrals for vocational students. One administrator estimates that 70 percent of the students find their first job through his office. Another says his office is the least important source of jobs, and that most students find jobs through friends, relatives, and other community contacts.

Follow-up. Vocational schools do follow-up because it's the law. But most use follow-up information to update their curriculum and to strengthen their ties with employers and the community. Placement coordinators report a variety of follow-up methods that work:

- Many no longer try to contact graduates by mail. It costs 44 cents to mail a flier with postage-paid return. At a 10 percent return rate, this is a waste of money, one coordinator feels. Instead, he recruits four students to spend three evenings per week on the telephone making personal contact with graduates. They are paid at the minimum-wage rate.
- Another placement coordinator distributes follow-up forms to teachers at the beginning of the school year, so that teachers will have them in case they see former students. A placement coordinator for handicapped students visits and revisits former students and their employers.
- In another district, follow-up is the responsibility of teachers, who may assign students to make follow-up contacts.

Schools use follow-up to communicate many kinds of information to graduates and employers.

- One vocational center beefed up instruction in the electronics of auto mechanics in response to graduate feedback.
- Another follows-up every job order with a form letter asking the employer to express his satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the school's services, or a letter of regret if the school cannot field a candidate.

- A community college does placement follow-up by phone during the summer months, eliciting information not only on where clients are working but how much they are earning.

Few vocational or technical schools consider that their placement responsibilities end with the graduate's getting his first job. Typical of their long-range efforts is a device such as a "call-back bulletin" that invites graduates to call in if they are interested in a job opportunity and tells them that if the placement office does not hear from them within several days, they will be dropped from the active placement list, but that they may be reinstated upon request. A community college placement office sends out post cards every other month inviting graduates to return the reply card in order to remain on the active placement file. Graduates are eligible to use the placement service to find their second and third jobs.

Job Development. Job placement and job development are a circular process, feeding each other. "One good placement will get us four more," says one placement coordinator. Placement people do not leave job development to chance. It is perhaps the phase of their work for which they take the most undivided responsibility in that:

- Most belong to personnel associations and business and service clubs in their communities.
- For almost all of them, job development involves time and travel beyond the normal school day or the usual 9 to 5 job.
- For some, there is a tendency to "live" the job, choosing church affiliations and leisure time activities that will expand their contacts in the employment community.

Advisory committees are a prevalent source of employer contacts. Placement people use a variety of strategies to reach beyond this circle:

- Newsletters to the business community with a "classified" section of graduates available for placement.
- Brochures listing the occupations for which the school trains people.
- Visits to job sites.
- Invitations to luncheons at the school.
- Seasonal mailing in anticipation of busy times for various professions — tax time for accounting firms, spring for florists and landscape companies, etc.

- Making school facilities available for business meetings. Suburban newspaper staffs and local automobile dealers have taken advantage of one vocational school's hospitality to schedule regional meetings there.

- A mass mailing to some 600 local companies each year, enclosing resumes of graduates trained in the disciplines each company hires.

- Personal visits to companies, where the placement officer leaves resumes of job candidates.

- A computer-written letter with resumes to companies who run "help wanted" ads in the Sunday newspaper.

One placement director who works with disadvantaged adults spends a great deal of her time developing contacts with entry-level employers. She counsels her clients that these jobs are "stepping-stone" positions to better second jobs, and that it is easier to find a job when one is already employed.

Placement Assistance for Special Populations

Mainstreaming of special education students, the influx of displaced homemakers and dislocated manufacturing workers, and the emphasis on liberating both men and women from sex-stereotyped occupations — all these trends indicate an expanded role for placement personnel beyond traditional placing of vocational graduates in fields for which they were trained.

Special Education Students. Public Law 94-142 requires that handicapped students be educated in "the least restrictive environment." Accordingly, students at a vocational Skill Center are able to transfer freely between regular courses and the Skill Center. At present, 137 students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) are being mainstreamed. But, says an administrator, "we serve a number of students whom it would be tragic to mainstream in a class of 25."

Other schools with less specialized resources report serving growing numbers of special education clients and achieving high placement rates as follows:

- One 14-district jointure has two coordinators and tutors to work with special needs students. The placement officer does not know who these students are, and doesn't want to, out of a desire to avoid labeling them.

- A large joint vocational district mainstreams 300 to 400 special education students, though they are not identified for any special placement effort. A special resource person works with classroom teachers who instruct these students.

- A county JVS in central Ohio serves a student population that is 25 percent special education students, and expects that as many as half the student body will be enrolled in special education in the future. A learning resource center for math and reading and tutors from the city and county school systems are some of the resources dedicated to these students.

Postsecondary schools do not, as a rule, provide extra resources for handicapped students, but they do attempt to serve them. One college president says, "If they get their degree, we know they'll be placed. They're very competent students. This is a clientele we always want to reach, but rarely can afford the intensive counseling that goes along with it. They have to have counseling."

Another technical college has a grant to teach handicapped drafting and design students to do computer-aided design (CAD). The staff includes a counselor who works with handicapped and learning disabled students. The program is too new, however, for administrators to know how these students will fare in the job market.

Adult Learners. Placement is the "bottom line" for adult vocational students. Except for students whose employers are paying for their upgrading and whose continued employment is assured, the sole purpose for these students' being in school is to get a job. Neither they nor the school has the luxury to experiment with various career options.

Often their training is financed through JTPA, which requires the school to train and place a specified percentage of adults before payment is approved. There is some competition among institutions that train adults. This puts additional pressure on the school to show high placement rates in order to attract adult clients.

Adult education in recent years has undergone "erratic and mushrooming growth in response to urgent needs and has not yet developed a formal system" of placement, a state administrator says. The state division is now formulating a model that seeks to address that lack.

At present, each school makes its own provisions for the various components of adult placement: assessment, pre-employment preparation, placement, and follow-up. Follow-up is done after one year, though the state official notes that "five-year follow-up would be a lot more accurate."

One coordinator who works with disadvantaged adults cautions against investing time and energy in developing high-tech, high-paying jobs for these clients, whom she characterized as having fewer social skills, language skills, and contacts in the predominant social structure. She said:

> Our greatest obligation is to develop job openings that will be easily accessible to these clients. In general, they're less "salable" initially. Contrary to what you may think, in some ways it is not a disadvantage to be "disadvantaged." They tend not to turn down entry-level work.

Placement services provided for adults are illustrated by these comments:

- One placement coordinator estimates he spends a quarter of his time serving adults; he holds evening office hours for them.
- Placement officers in schools that hold evening classes for adults recognize that they have a responsibility to these clients, though most do not make special provisions for them, such as evening office hours.
- Employers often contract for vocational school staff and facilities to retrain or upgrade employees. In some cases, the staff conducts training at the place of employment. There's no lapse in the clients' employment, so these programs do not place an added burden on the placement office.
- Most proprietary schools have evening school for adults retraining and make their placement services available to these students.

Guiding Students Toward Nontraditional Employment. Affirmative action is a boon to placement people. They are able to tell male students, for example, that their chances of employment are actually improved if they select cosmetology, health, or secretarial occupations; that women are in high demand in trades like carpentry and welding.

One JVS has formalized this effort in "Yes, I Can" Career Camp, where ninth grade girls do a "hands-on" tour of "masculine" occupations, then spend a day at a nearby community college learning about male-dominated technologies such as welding or engineering. The placement officer reports that "it's harder to sell the parents than their daughters" on these careers. (Perhaps it will be easier as parents learn of more women graduates like the one who just started a heavy equipment operator's job at $19 per hour!)

Placement coordinators receive requests specifically for women or minorities to fill nontraditional jobs. One community college is engaged in a cooperative program with

a nearby appliance manufacturer and JTPA to train women in electronics repair and electrical engineering. JTPA pays tuition and the manufacturing company guarantees employment upon completion.

At the secondary level, placement officers must be vigilant not to perpetuate or reinforce sex-stereotyping in employment opportunities. One placement coordinator says:

> Most of us deal very openly and honestly with sex equity. For instance, I tell employers on the phone, "I will terminate this conversation unless you choose to talk not in terms of girl and boy, but student or employee."

Impediments to Effective Placement

In an ideal world, everyone who wanted or needed a job would have one, and there would be no need for placement officers. But placement people are realistic. They recognize that time, geography, economics, and human nature impose limits on the job they can do. Some of these limits they can do little about. Others can be, and are being, remedied.

Lack of Mobility. Lack of mobility and, to a lesser extent, lack of communication, limit job prospects. This is especially true of adults. It is pronounced in the Appalachian southeastern part of Ohio, where placement people note that family ties are especially strong. But adults everywhere have family ties and responsibilities that make them reluctant to move. As one placement coordinator says, "Adults have too many commitments to home and community; kids don't have the resources to move." This placement coordinator estimates that 99 percent of his placements are within 20 to 30 miles. Another placement coordinator in a school that draws from several counties says that students in the outlying fringes are most likely not to work.

Even though out-of-district placement is rare, efforts are made to expand the job market for students.

- Placement officers make information about jobs out of the district available to their students by subscribing to other cities' newspapers.
- On occasion, they will refer job requests that they can't fill to the placement coordinator in a neighboring district, who may have candidates with the desired qualifications.

- One placement coordinator subscribes to the Interstate Job Bank, which lists job openings nationwide. He reports, though, that the service is not well used.

There are other agencies besides the schools and school placement offices that could help, one job development coordinator notes, but no systematic way of tapping into these resources.

> There's an incredible cross-network of social services in this state, but it's not well coordinated. There are lots of pieces of the puzzle, but it's not put together. There are lots of people being served, but I'm not sure it's not accidental.

Consequently, vocational schools train students almost exclusively for jobs that exist in the local job market, and placement coordinators job-develop close to home. The more rural the setting, the farther they will go to develop employer contacts.

Postsecondary placement people recognize that they are training people for a wider job market. Depending on the technology, job development may be national in scope. "One of the effects of education," a college president observes, "is to move people into higher-income, more specialized work. They join a more mobile population." Nevertheless, his institution places an estimated 75 percent of its graduates within 50 miles.

The placement officer at another technical college fights the Appalachian inclination to remain close to home. "I try to get students to be willing to move — especially from a low-industry, rural area," she says. But local people don't want to move. If I get them to Columbus, I feel I've done well."

Lack of Awareness. Many placement people feel that their service is not well known, even among their target clients, despite extensive efforts through print, broadcast media, and word-of-mouth. Teachers are the most important avenue for letting students know about the placement service. Even so, says one placement coordinator, "Most kids do not realize there's a placement service here, or how to use it."

Until three years ago, one technical college's placement was decentralized. Each technology placed its own graduates. The placement coordinator thinks it will take two more years before her office will have high visibility with students and faculty.

To many placement coordinators, lack of visibility is not a major drawback. One coordinator admits that students are not aware enough of the placement service the school offers, but he's not as concerned with marketing the placement service as he is with preparing them to find their own jobs.

Lack of Time. A recurring theme with teachers, administrators, and placement people is the time constraint on doing effective placement. Most schools do not reimburse teachers for job development or placement, though most do reimburse for mileage traveled in these pursuits.

Conscientious teachers who do not have the services of a placement coordinator find it hard to fit placement into their schedules. Those in schools that do have placement personnel are grateful for the time that the service frees up for them. Administrators are unanimous in their wish that teachers might be reimbursed or given released time for placement.

The time constraint is universally felt. As one administator said, "Shortness of time is our biggest single problem in placement."

The Local Economy. No matter how much time they are able to devote, or how innovative their methods, placement coordinators' success is very much a factor of the local economy. A tour of vocational placement offices serves as a barometer of the variety of economic conditions prevailing in Ohio.

In areas of chronic high unemployment, placement coordinators employ their best efforts just to stay even. "This area draws people," says a placement coordinator in an Appalachian county. "People will work for very little just to stay here."

"People don't let go of jobs here without something else to go to," agrees a postsecondary counterpart in the same locale. "The only job turnovers are when an employee gets sick, retires, or dies."

The exodus of manufacturing jobs from the northeastern part of the state is clearly reflected in vocational placement offices, where the main thrust is in federally-funded programs to train and place displaced, unemployed, and underemployed adult workers.

In and near the large cities, placement officers speak of the rebounding economy, though the picture is not uniformly rosy.

- A JVS near a large metropolitan center, but serving a primarily rural population, is experiencing a drop in enrollment traceable to area population changes. Enrollment was 3,600 in 1983, 3,200 in 1984, and 2,900 in 1985. "We used to graduate 2,000," the placement officer points out.

- Enrollment at the mid-size city technical college also is at the mercy of local employment cycles, fluctuating as much as 15 to 20 percent from year to year. This is an expensive proposition in a technical college where programs are inherently expensive and resource-intensive.

- A JVS in a county that consistently has the lowest or nearly the lowest unemployment in the state has more job requests than it can fill.

- In a JVS outside a large southwestern Ohio city, "We have jobs hunting people," the placement coordinator says. He expects to place 1,000 students during the 1985-86 school year, up from 800 in 1985, 500 in 1983, and 250 in 1982.

- The JVS that serves the southern fringe of Ohio's largest metro area had placed all 1986 seniors before the end of 1985. The placement coordinator credits the quality of the school as well as the local economy. "I'm only as good as the kids and teachers," he says. "I only have to polish the stone here. Maybe in another district, I'd have to grind it."

Rewards of the Job

Despite its frustrations and limitations, placement people see their job as one of the most rewarding in education. They're proud of the individual success stories in which they've helped write an early chapter:

- A former JVS student now serves on the school board.

- Instances abound of graduates who now own their own businesses, sit on vocational advisory committees, and have job openings for new vocational graduates.

- A boy who graduated from the Skill Center for handicapped students in 1983 now has his own apartment and telephone, does his own grocery shopping, and is trusted with training new employees at the large grocery chain where he works.

Placement people frequently see their success not just in terms of individual lives, but in the context of the school, community, and society. One sees his efforts paying off best in helping hard-to-place students find their niche in a community with a very strong work ethic. Says another, "Hopefully, I have made a difference in the lives of the students. I know I have in the business community."

Says a Placement officer in the state's Appalachian region:

There's not much I can do to change the economy, but I hope to place students in this geographical area and in their area of training. It's good for the economy and the community and good public relations for the school.

An adult educator talks about the social and economic impact of his work:

If you remember that each percentage point of unemployment puts a $100 million burden on the system in terms of lost tax revenues and welfare and unemployment compensation, then it's easy to see that fulfilling individual personal needs translates into long-range societal benefit.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Opinion and practice vary as to how much should be done for the student, as opposed to teaching him the skills to find his own job. To a great extent, this is determined by the needs of the institution and the clientele. Special education students need more help than regular students; proprietary schools need to place graduates in order to remain in business.

2. The most successful placement efforts are backed by the commitment of school and community and are nourished by constant communication.

3. Staffing for the placement function in Ohio's vocational schools and technical and community colleges ranges from a well-equipped Career Center manned by three full-time personnel, to situations in which teachers have the entire placement responsibility. Where there is a full-time placement person, teachers still do placement.

4. Placement success is very much a function of the local economy as well as the placement person's experience, skill, and dedication.

5. The placement office is only one, and often not the most important, source of jobs for graduates. Friends, relatives, other community contacts, and "I just went down and applied" are frequently named as ways that students find jobs.

6. Follow-up is used as a means of communicating with employers and getting feedback on the graduate's satisfaction with his training, as well as fulfilling the state mandate for data. Schools drop and add programs as a result of this information.

7. Many placement offices help graduates to find their second and third jobs.

8. Vocational schools train students almost exclusively for jobs in the local job market. Out-of-district placements are rare. Lack of mobility is a strong deterrent to placement, especially among adults.

9. The initiatives of the Career Development Service have made a difference, giving greater cohesiveness, effectiveness, and visibility to placement in Ohio's vocational schools. Through creation of a statewide Placement Task Force, regional and state meetings, a directory of school placement personnel, and, now in preparation, a placement manual, Ohio's placement officers are in contact with their peers and can look to a central agency for coordination of their efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Funding be provided for at least one placement person in each Vocational Education Planning District to create a central referral point for all employment opportunities coming into the school. (Administrators agree that it is important that job leads not get "lost in the cracks," and a central placement office is the surest means of preventing that.)

2. More released time or other compensation be provided to allow teachers to do placement. (Nowhere is it suggested, even in districts with strong placement components, that placement officers supplant teachers as the key people in placement.)

3. More clerical support, whether by computer or staff, be provided to help placement people with the great amount of paperwork and recordkeeping that placement and follow-up entail. (Many placement people speak of additional useful information that they don't now have time or resources to gather and organize; for example: longer-term follow-up.)

4. A clear separation be made between placement and guidance functions. (The Career Development Service has distinguished separate roles for guidance and placement. Guidance counselors who are also assigned to do placement say that they cannot do both satisfactorily.)

5. Specific criteria be established for training and hiring placement people. (Their backgrounds should include work in non-school jobs. They should be conversant with education, social service, and business. They should be able to think of occupations in clusters in order to advise clients on a range of job possibilities in a chosen field. They should work year-round, the same as business, instead of the nine-month school year.)

6. State-sanctioned (not mandated) curricular materials be developed to provide for more uniformity in teaching of pre-employment skills.

7. More realistic expectations of clients' initial value in the marketplace be developed. (Job training funding sources often set earnings and other requirements too high.)

8. A statewide toll-free 800-number telephone referral service to placement agencies and other helpful services be established. (These services could be patterned after Missouri's Statewide Job Placement Service, which links 66 vocational schools with technical and community colleges.)

9. Articulation between vocational schools and technical and community colleges be strengthened so that more students will use vocational education as a door to further training.*

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* For more information about this subject, the reader is advised to see "Status of Articulation Between Vocational and Technical Education in Ohio," a research report published by the Ohio Council on Vocational Education.

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